

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 07645 271638Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----281119Z 084928 /23
R 271005Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3703

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 7645

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IN, US
SUBJECT: CONSULTATIONS WITH GOI ON INDIAN OCEAN

1. THE AMBASSADOR HAS HAD TWO PRELIMINARY CONVERSATIONS WITH GOI OFFICIALS IN REGARD TO OUR REQUEST FOR THEIR VIEWS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN FOR OUR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. HE TALKED WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY MEHTA ON MAY 23 AND FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE ON MAY 26. THUS FAR, WHILE THESE INDIAN OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED GENERAL VIEWS, THEY HAVE NOT FORMALLY RESPONDED TO OUR QUERY AND INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE GOI IS CONSULTING WITH OTHER LITTORALS PRIOR TO RESPONDING. SINCE WE HAVE NO INDICATION WHEN THIS PROCESS WILL BE COMPLETE, WE ARE SENDING THIS PRELIMINARY REPORT.

2. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, EXPLAINING THAT HIS VIEWS WERE PRELIMINARY AND THAT HE WAS "THINKING ALOUD", SAID THAT IN VIEW OF THE LIMITATIONS ON INFORMATION WHICH THE GOI HAS ABOUT GREAT POWER NAVAL PRESENCES AND SUPPORT INSTALLATIONS, HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THE GOI COULD GO BEYOND GENERAL COMMENT. HE EXPLAINED THE CONCERNS OF LITTORAL COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF THEIR APPREHENSIONS THAT NAVAL PRESENCES AND BASES MIGHT BE FOR THE CONTINGENCY OF INTERVENTION IN LOCAL COUNTRIES. IF GLOBAL POWERS MAINTAIN THEIR NAVAL ACTIVITIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN ONLY TO PROTECT TRADE, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY
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TARY ASKED, DOES THIS REQUIRE GREAT WARSHIPS SUCH AS AIRCRAFT CARRIERS? IN REGARD TO SHORE INSTALLATIONS EMPLOYED BY THE US AND SOVIET UNION, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THE GOI DID NOT KNOW WHAT FACILITIES WERE AT BERBERA; HE DESCRIBED IN DETAIL THE CAPABILITIES OF DIEGO GARCIA, HOWEVER. HE SAID THAT THERE WAS A QUESTION OF THE DEFINITION REGARDING BASES AND REMARKED THAT A FIXED BASE WITH A SPECTRUM OF

CAPABILITIES (DIEGO GARCIA, BY IMPLICATION) POSED A GREATER PROBLEM THAN "ONE THAT CAN HANDLE MISSILES." (PRESUMABLY BERBERA). HE QUICKLY EXPLAINED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOI APPROACH WAS NOT AGAINST ONE SIDE AND THAT THE ARGUMENT OF WHO STARTED A NAVAL RACE DID NOT HELP. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY SAID THE GOI HAD DISCUSSED THE INDIAN OCEAN WHEN SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO WAS IN DELHI AND THE SOVIETS ALSO KNEW OF INDIA'S CONCERNS. HE ASKED IF THE US WAS CONSULTING WITH OTHER LITTORAL COUNTRIES AND, WHEN THE AMBASSADOR REPLIED IN THE AFFIRMATIVE, INDICATED THAT THERE WAS A COLLECTIVE VIEW OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES. LATER, IN AN INFORMAL CONVERSATION, HE IMPLIED THAT THE GOI WOULD WISH TO CONSULT WITH OTHER NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES PRIOR TO REPLYING FORMALLY.

3. THE AMBASSADOR INFORMED FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE THAT WE HAD REQUESTED THE VIEWS OF THE GOI ON DEMILITARIZATION OF THE INDIAN OCEAN PRIOR TO OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SOVIETS. THE FOREIGN MINISTER SAID THE GOI WELCOMED THE PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN WHICH OPENS UP NEW POSSIBILITIES. HE SAID HE HOPED THAT THE US-SOVIET DISCUSSIONS WOULD LEAD TO ESTABLISHMENT OF A ZONE OF PEACE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. VAJPAYEE SAID THAT WHEN THE INDIAN OCEAN WAS DISCUSSED WITH GROMYKO, THE LATTER HAD SAID THAT THE USSR HAD NO BASES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. GROMYKO HAD SAID THAT THE INDIANS WOULD BE WELCOME TO COME THERE AND SEE FOR THEMSELVES. GROMYKO FURTHER STATED THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PREPARED TO TALK TO THEIR AMERICAN FRIENDS ALONG THESE LINES. THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD NO COMMENT TO MAKE ON THE AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENT THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAD PICURES OF SOVIET INSTALLATIONS

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IN BERBERA. VAJPAYEE CONCLUDED THIS PART OF THE CONVERSATION SAYING THAT THE GOI WOULD LIKE TO BE KEPT CONSTANTLY INFORMED ABOUT US-SOVIET DISCUSSIONS ON THE INDIAN OCEAN.

4. COMMENT: WE ARE UNSURE OF WHAT FURTHER COMMENT WE WILL GET FROM THE GOI. WE DOUBT THAT IT WILL WANT TO BE PUT IN A POSITION OF HAVING TO TELL THE SOVIETS THAT INDIA QUESTIONS THEIR STATEMENT ON BASES OR HAVING TO TELL US THAT THEY AGREE THE SOVIETS HAVE NO BASES. CONSEQUENTLY, THE GOI MAY KEEP TO GENERAL COMMENT.

5. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO APPROPRIATE ADDRESSEES.

GOHEEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TROOP DEPLOYMENT, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 27-May-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977NEWDE07645
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770191-0817
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770510/aaaaahwc.tel
Line Count: 111
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8f28c486-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05-Apr-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2313765
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONSULTATIONS WITH GOI ON INDIAN OCEAN
TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, IN, US, UR, XO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8f28c486-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009